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Friday 3rd July 2026

Dear Baroness Smith

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the IFS report on higher education income outcomes and the Government's intentions for the future of HE.

GuildHE welcomes the IFS report. We support any efforts to describe the value of higher education, but caution against conclusions that align that value with salaries alone. The purpose of higher education is to enable personal and professional development, whilst also adding to wider society through things like research, innovation, teaching and culture.

The current focus of the political and public discussion around higher education is often confined to individual return on investment, graduate salaries, and student debt. While these are certainly significant considerations, they fail to represent the full spectrum of benefits derived from higher education. The value generated extends beyond the individual students, encompassing vital contributions to innovation, economic productivity, regional development, support for essential professions, and the strengthening of communities and civic life. This broader perspective, however, is frequently absent from national conversations.

Graduates typically earn higher salaries than non-graduates across the range of courses. The fact that they do not always is more a function of the labour market and how our economy is structured than it is a comment about the value of particular courses.

Higher education delivers teachers to our schools, social workers to our communities, police officers to our neighbourhoods, and paramedics, nurses, and other healthcare workers when we need them. We rely on graduates to provide our food via our agricultural industry. We enjoy our theatres, concert halls, and streaming content thanks to the work of creative arts graduates. All of us take for granted the numerous ways our daily lives are shaped, supported and enriched by all those who attend higher education and yet so many of those graduates, if judged by salary alone, would be deemed to have made the wrong choice in a system that equates salaries with value.

We would therefore oppose, and our members would have serious concerns over, moves to limit student numbers in courses based solely on graduate income analysis, without mind to other wider considerations. Doing so could not only rob the country of important societal benefits, not to mention those to the individuals aspiring to move into those professions, but also have the potential to undermine the viability of individual institutions, many of which are significant employers in their communities.

We welcome the excellent engagement that we already enjoy with the Government as one of the three historically recognised representative bodies for HE institutions, and would be delighted to discuss these proposals further in due course.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brooke Storer-Church".

Dr Brooke Storer-Church
Chief Executive, GuildHE